

TEKKING: TRANSVERSING VIRTUAL AND INTERNATIONAL BOUNDARIES TO EXPLORE AND DEVELOP EFFECTIVE ADULT LEARNER EXPERIENCES

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ABSTRACT

Most electronic communities have little crossover communication with each other, beyond specific linkages to other sites. So there is scant crossover among the world of academia, the “world of work,” and the virtual world of social media. The objective of this research is to examine e-learning communities across academic disciplines to explore “crossover” research in multiple academic disciplines, as well as in elearning and adult learning, to see if there could be key issues brought to the foreground that affect adult learners and student retention. In addition to conducting historic research across a number of academic disciplines, the study also provides a case study that could reveal insights into factors that shed more light on adult learners and retention in online courses by traversing academic disciplines to achieve thicker research and contribute to the body of research on online adult learners in a range of academic disciplines.

KEYWORDS

ELearning, Interdisciplinary Studies, Adult learners, Collaboration, Cognitive Load Theory

1. ACADEMICS’ HESITATE CROSSING ACADEMIC BORDERS FOR RESEARCH THAT COULD HELP ADULT ELEARNERS

The mass availability of global electronic databases, however, now allows researchers to stumble upon expert research studies from other academic disciplines that could shed new light on old questions, such as how to help students complete their academic studies.

What does research across academic disciplines have to do with adult learners and student retention? While most universities budget monies and resources for new technologies to accommodate social media, few are looking at ways to restructure students’ ways of learning new materials with those technologies and what they already know. Prior knowledge could be important, particularly because, as of 2013, students are older than traditional age students of the average ages 18-22, and they come to college with a vast array of experiences. While traditional age students still predominate at four year universities, there are a growing number of students who are generally older, averaging 23-27 years of age. About 43 percent of undergraduates enrolled in postsecondary education in the United States are age 24 or older (National Center for Education Statistics, 2007). These adult learners, because of the additional responsibilities and time requirements, often choose online courses. But the course completion rates and graduation rates of students enrolled in online courses are much lower, averaging 60% completion of online courses, and slightly lower completion rates for online programs (Gallop, 2013), so, the question is, with more students being attracted to online courses, how can administrators help students to have higher completion rates in those online courses and programs? The problem of attrition in online courses persists, regardless of academic discipline, so it would be helpful if there may be best practices found that could provide insights into higher student retention across academic disciplines.

The researcher in this study first researched data available on distance and e-learning in the disciplines of computer science, Education, Commerce, and Human Sciences then found there was also a growing body of research on distance learning as a separate field of research.

She then sought to integrate these subjects related to successful course completion and student retention in online courses in those disciplines. Computer Science and Software Engineering on eLearning, Education, Curriculum, and Instruction on eLearning, Commerce, and distance education as an academic discipline. But there are important research gaps in all of the above-mentioned fields of study, particularly with respect to eLearning and social media. Perhaps the reasons for the gaps could reside, at least partially, from the segmentation of all these arenas, none of which, ironically, are segmented when a person conducts an Internet *Google* or *Wikipedia* search.

The researcher examined research in the above academic discipline areas; she also looked at issues of cognitive load and its possible effects on students in online courses; and she conducted case study research to see if interdisciplinary research could provide more insight into how to help students navigate successfully through online programs. The explorations in this research provide data that can encourage academics to traverse broader intellectual plains; they can find these new “category” borders readily available simply by crossing over into a wider array of disciplines by conducting an Internet search; those who elect to span multiple academic and cultural disciplines can find vast new territories of knowledge bases, like treasure troves, waiting to be discovered.

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There are over sixty additional references for this study.